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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2215
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SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
TSA FOR SUSAN HASMAN

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FAA MIAMI FOR MAYTE ASHBY

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: U.S. FAA CATEGORY ONE STATUS PRESENTATION - THE
SKY'S THE LIMIT

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In an official ceremony on March 24, organized by the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority, Ambassador Kramer presented the organization with Category One status on behalf of the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration. This classification could open the way for regional airlines to increase service to the U.S., both in terms of number of flights and cities served, thus improving the earning potential of these tourism-based economies. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On March 24 Ambassador Kramer presented the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States' (OECS) Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority (ECCAA) with U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Category One status at a formal ceremony in Antigua. Other dignitaries at the presentation included the Prime Ministers from St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Antigua and Barbuda, as well as the Director General of the OECS, and representatives from the UN's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the ECCAA.

¶3. (U) Note: Category One status applies to flight safety oversight demonstrating that the regulating authority, in this case the ECCAA, is ensuring that airlines are training their crews and maintaining their planes according to international standards. Category One status does not apply to aviation security issues such as physical security at airports or security screening of passengers and baggage. End Note.

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

¶4. (U) The official presentation included statements by Antigua's PM Baldwin Spencer, OECS Director General Dr. Len Ishmael, ECCAA and ICAO representatives, and a feature address by St. Vincent's PM Ralph Gonsalves, in his current role as Chairman of the OECS Authority. Near the end of the two-hour ceremony, Ambassador Kramer formally presented the ECCAA with a letter conferring U.S. FAA Category One status.

¶5. (U) The Ambassador's brief comments emphasized regional cooperation to achieve national goals and praised the OECS and ECCAA for their hard work and dedication in regaining

Category One status. The lengthy ceremony highlighted the importance of this achievement to these small tourism-dependent island states. The OECS has been working for 10 years to regain this status, lost in June 1996 when the FAA downgraded it after an International Aviation Safety Assessment.

¶6. (SBU) Attaining Category One status will give OECS carrier LIAT the opportunity to increase the frequency of its flights to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and enable both LIAT and Caribbean Star to begin new routes to the U.S. as well. (Note: A reliable Embassy contact in Antigua indicated "close-hold" that Caribbean Star owner R. Allen Stanford may be in the market to acquire a couple of jets for his airline. Category One status combined with successful bids to begin routes to major U.S. locations could justify the expense. The airline's own press release March 27 lauded the new Category One status as an important achievement supporting its "already aggressive expansion plans." End note.)

COMMENT

¶7. (U) In addition to enabling regional airlines to increase their service to one of their largest and most lucrative markets, achieving Category One status is a concrete positive result of regional cooperation. Such coordination is critical to the long-term prospects of these small, vulnerable states of the Eastern Caribbean. In the near term, the OECS governments can build on this success to handle security, immigration, and trade preparations for the March 2007 Cricket World Cup and the ongoing integration of the OECS into the Caribbean Single Market and Economy.
KRAMER